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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000773

DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG
NSC FOR HUDSON AND PITTMAN
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: SPLM NATIONAL CONVENTION: THE ROLLER COASTER CONTINUES

11. (SBU) The SPLM National Convention recessed abruptly on May 17 to allow for a six-hour extraordinary session of the Interim National Council. The future of Dr. Riek Machar - and the embattled GOSS Vice President's legacy of untrustworthiness and brutality within the South - brought decisions on the SPLM's executive structure to a near stand-still. The leadership body was reconstituted one day after its formal dissolution in order to pacify the rank and file delegates gripped by rumors that Machar's ouster from the party leadership would push him to foment violence among his fellow-ethnic Nuer that would divide and destabilize the region. Intra-party elections, scheduled to start May 18, have been delayed.

12. (SBU) While a significant number of SPLM party officials, including GOSS Regional Cooperation Minister Benjamin, GOSS Representative to the U.S. Ezekiel Gatkuouth, and Presidential Affairs Minister Luka Biong Deng, have gone out of their way to downplay its relevance to USG officials, the schism over the "vice chairman question" continues to grow. The May 12 INC saw Kiir supporters win outright the debate on the party's draft constitution, which held there would be only one vice chairman. Less than one hour after it convened, Mansour Khalid told poloffs that the leadership body was equally divided, despite a continued push by party chairman Salva Kiir Mayardit that "the time for change is now."

13. (SBU) GNU Humanitarian Affairs Minister Haroun Run Lual told poloffs May 17 that Machar was called upon to publicly defend his relationship with ex-SSDF commander Paulino Matiep and respond to rumors about clandestine meetings with Nuer officials. Machar dismissed both as nonsense. Kiir informed the assembled leadership that Matiep had told him that he was in Unity State to consult with traditional healers before traveling to America for additional medical treatment. Matiep told a similar story to CG Juba the week of May 12.

14. (SBU) Crafting a compromise that meshed democratic practices with the status quo, the May 17 INC revised its earlier decision on the party's draft constitution, opting to keep the SPLM's current vice chairman structure. All three of the Vice Chairmen shall be elected, but ranked according to respective vote totals. Despite pressure from his state delegates, current Vice Chairman and Blue Nile State Governor told CG Juba May 18 that he has "zero interest" in remaining in his position. Observers argue that Kiir will have to work to establish whom should fill the slot in order to prevent Machar from filling it with his own candidate, as he did during the Unity State SPLM Congress. Operating assumptions in Juba are that Kiir's preferred candidate -- Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly Speaker James Wani Igga -- will win the top slot, with Machar as a close -- and perhaps "stabilizing" -- second.

15. (SBU) Rather than end intra-party speculation about forthcoming leadership changes, Juba is now transfixed by additional intrigue. The INC used the "any other business" agenda point to reverse itself on the membership ceiling for the National Liberation Council (NLC),

upping the total from 250 to 270. While the NLC is not expected to meet more than once a year (if at all) the democratically-elected body is charged with electing the Secretary General. With one-third of the elected seats "set-asides" for SPLM Northern Sector representatives, and credible reports by many (including fellow Deputy Secretary Anne Itto) alleging that Deputy Secretary Yasir Arman manipulated final delegate selection in the sector, diplomatic corps observers believe the SPLM has bought breathing space for a dark-horse candidate. Despite his emphatic denials that he would accept the position, the popular push at the moment is for the retention of SG Pagan Amum.

16. (SBU) According to multiple sources, SG Amum sustained five solid minutes of applause following his status report on the party during the convention's May 16 session. SPLM Youth-wing leader told CG Juba May 17 that he intended push the youth vote to Amum, and was meeting with Shilluk elders and party heavy-weights such as James Kok and Yasir Arman on the issue. While Haroun told poloffs that Arman and Amum have feuded in the past, Arman recognizes the value of Amum's presence in an NCP/SPLM elections struggle as considerable more valuable than that of Taban Deng Gai. Gai appears to have reached the same conclusion, reportedly consulting with Amum before accepting Kiir's May 11 anointment to be future SG.

17. (SBU) Comment: The verdict still isn't in on Pagan Amum's future in the party following the convention. Though he is viewed by many as overly emotional and outspoken, most SPLM members acknowledge his strengths as a party strategist and don't want to see him leave his post as Cabinet Affairs Minister in the GNU (as he has threatened to do if removed as Secretary General). Northern members of the SPLM especially support Amum's adherence to Garang's vision of unity. One of the ironies of the first few days of the convention was that

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while the formal convention convened with a message of national unity to delegates from the entirety of Sudan, southerners are negotiating for the top spots in the party in order to retain tribal unity in the South with an eye on the referendum in 2011.

FERNANDEZ